

Patron Satisfaction with Interlibrary Loan Services in Hickory Public Libraries

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**Abstract**

This paper explores several books and published articles written on interlibrary loans and patron satisfaction with the process. To meet patron expectations, libraries and information professionals must be aware of how effective their services may be. With the ever-growing amount of information, materials, and services that libraries have to offer, they must be constantly in touch with the needs of library users to ensure that they are satisfied. Hickory Public Libraries offer ILL services to cardholders who may put in requests via paper request form. However, there are certain restrictions for patrons to complete a request. This paper contains a brief overview of interlibrary loan operations in Hickory Public Libraries. The objective is to examine the Hickory Public Library overall ILL process and patron satisfaction with the services, and to determine if patrons would be more likely to use services if there were less restrictions and limitations to the ILL process.

*Keywords:* Interlibrary loan, patron satisfaction, turnaround time

## Introduction

Interlibrary loans allow patrons to request materials that may not be currently available at their local library. This is a crucial process because it opens the doors to those who do not have direct access to certain books, articles, movies, and other materials. Libraries serve as the bridges between patrons and the materials they need or desire. As availability of information and materials increases, so do expectations. Libraries must not become complacent in this sense; they must continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their services and question whether they are meeting the expectations of users. Sarah Greene, Branch Head of Patrick Beaver Memorial Library, notes that many people tend to think that everything is on the internet. There are still many items that are either not included in databases or that have not been digitized. It is a real convenience for patrons that they do not have to drive to a university to access resources (S. Greene, personal communication, July 9, 2018). The overall ILL process must be convenient, easily understood, timely, and accurate. If information professionals do not meet these requirements, patrons are less likely to use these services. Hickory Public Libraries offer ILL services to patrons, but there are certain restrictions that may hinder the processes and cause some to avoid the services completely. Cardholders may fill out an Interlibrary Loan Request Form, which is only available in person. Only one request is allowed per form, and any form containing multiple requests will be discarded without processing. Only one free request may be put in per week, and up to two additional requests may be made with a cost of \$3.00 per item. This notice is bolded and underlined at the top of the request form. The form also forbids patrons from requesting books published within the last six months. However, they are encouraged to fill out a purchase request for newly published items so that they may be considered for future collections. The ILL services are restricted to cardholders aged 18 or older who do not have any

unpaid charges on their record. Overdue fines are \$0.50 per day, per item, and there is a \$3.00 processing fee for items that are not picked up. Three non-pickups will result in loss of privileges. Materials may only be picked up at the Reference desk in person; home-delivery is not currently offered through Hickory Public Library ILL services. Typical turnaround time for requests is around 10-14 days, but oftentimes, it may take even longer. The form even states that “ILL services are not quick, and they are not well suited to time-sensitive requests.” The objective of this study is to evaluate patron satisfaction with the ILL services in Hickory Public Libraries. Users will be asked to rate the ease of access, convenience, turnaround time, and general satisfaction with the process. Results will be evaluated to determine where bottlenecks arise in the process and how ILL services could potentially be improved. In addition, this study will determine if patrons would be more likely to use services if there were less restrictions and limitations to the process.

### **Literature Review**

In the past 15 years there have been numerous studies conducted on the topic of patron satisfaction with ILL services. A majority of the research is focused on services offered in academic settings with populations consisting of graduate students and faculty members. This data is relevant to this study, but a broader scope of population is necessary for more accurate research. In terms of patron satisfaction, there are several key aspects that play a role. These include convenience, turnaround time, usefulness, and quality of materials. Horton and Smith (2010) offered an overview of the current landscape of physical delivery in libraries. They noted that some public libraries have established home-delivery services, but the costs can be about the same as running an entire branch. They mentioned the publication of the U.S. Interlibrary Code in 1917, and how resource sharing has evolved and expanded since then to meet patron needs in

a cost-effective way. Research by Naylor and Wolfe (2008) supported that one of the problems users faced was print quality of documents. Users responded to a survey and reported that photographs or tables were unclear and overall print quality was poor. Others reported reluctance to travel to a library to pick up physical materials because it was inconvenient. This research highlights some of the areas that patrons are not completely satisfied with. Another study was conducted to evaluate an electronic document delivery service in Texas A&M University Libraries. Yang (2004) analyzed the responses of 5,600 registered users when asked why they were satisfied with Interlibrary Services and deliveries. Users were able to include multiple answers in the survey. 84.1% responded it was because the service was offered to them at no cost, 69.9% responded that it was because they did not have to physically travel to the library, and 34.3% responded that it was due to high quality of items. Only 38.5% responded that they were satisfied with services because of helpful staff interactions. This may be due to the fact that ILL services offered were more self-sufficient. Zopfi-Jordan (2008) elaborated on the criteria for determining whether materials should be purchased instead of borrowed, which could temporarily increase turnaround time for patron access. He noted the importance of being aware of what materials patrons need, and for how long they will be needed. He also stressed the importance of knowing costs and timelines for requested materials. If organizations did not feel the cost justified the services, they would be less likely to offer certain materials through ILL. This research emphasizes the value of awareness for patron expectations. Research by Curl (2004) provided answers to the question of whether it was necessary for patrons' satisfaction to improve delivery time. Participants in a survey were asked what the perceived delivery time of materials was, if this turnaround time was satisfactory, and if it influenced continued use of ILL services. The population consisted of faculty members and college seniors. 32% of seniors and

12% of faculty members indicated that delivery time was unsatisfactory. Results also showed that while participants were generally satisfied with the delivery services, several commented that they would prefer to see rush recall for requested items. Some also noted that they were unhappy with the loan period and the limit on number of items to be requested. While these percentages may seem insignificant compared to the whole, the research still demonstrated that there was a level of discontent. All of these studies illustrated the importance of being aware of patron needs. If libraries and information professionals remain in tune with patron expectations and they make an effort to track patron satisfaction with ILL services, this gives them the ability to target ways to improve their services.

### **Methodology**

A survey will be made available for library patrons in the Hickory area. It may be necessary to seek approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct this study. Since ILL request forms are only available for in person pick-up at Hickory Public Libraries, advertisements for the patron survey will be distributed within close proximity of these forms. A link to the survey will also be posted on the library website. This is a non-probability convenience sampling method since all survey responses will be incorporated and. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Participants should include a diverse population with no regards to race, sex, gender, age, status, etc. Participants will be notified via e-mail and the survey will be administered with a brief questionnaire. Participants have the option to either complete the survey on their computer or mobile device. The questionnaire for the study will contain the following:

1. What type of materials were requested, and how many? (books, articles, movies, other)
2. Were you charged for this ILL request? If so, how much?

3. How would you rate the ease of the initial ILL request process? (possible 1-5 scale)
4. Was turnaround time for materials longer than 10-14 days? If so, how long?
5. How likely are you to recommend LIS services to fellow patrons?
6. Would you be more likely to use these services if they were offered at no cost?
7. Would you be more likely to use these services if multiple materials could be requested?
8. Would these services be more convenient if a home-delivery option were available?
9. How would you rate the overall ILL process in Hickory Public Libraries?
10. What improvements would you recommend for the overall ILL process?

Participants will be given an adequate amount of time to respond to the questionnaire. After 10 weeks, the survey will be closed. Responses will be gathered and compiled into tables and graphs for observation. With permission from the library, there will be a 3-week trial for users wishing to put in ILL requests. There will be no age restrictions, zero fees, and patrons will be able to request up to 5 materials at a time. The request form will also be made available online so that users do not have to physically travel to the library to fill it out. At the conclusion of this study, survey and experiment results will be evaluated to determine overall patron satisfaction with the Hickory Public Library ILL services. These results will highlight bottlenecks in the process and can be used to evaluate how ILL services may be improved. In addition, the experimental study will reveal if patrons would be more likely to use ILL services if there were less restrictions in the process.

### **Anticipated Findings and Limitations**

Prior to any implementation, we anticipate that patrons will be more likely to use this service if it were offered at no cost to them. We expect that patrons will be generally satisfied with the service, but we would like to gather opinions on how it could be improved overall. This

study is limited in the fact that it is a qualitative study, so findings cannot be considered generalizable. However, the aim of the study is to examine a specific region and does not need to be generalized to the entire population. Another limitation is the fact that it is catered to those who are already familiar with the ILL service and have most likely used it in the past, so they may have personal bias. Future research may include how to effectively advertise ILL services so that more patrons are interested in using them.

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